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Peace Corps OKs Protests ---in the U.S.

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WASHINGTON—Faced with rising antiwar dissent among its volunteers overseas, the Peace Corps is endorsing efforts of volunteers who arrange to come home to protest, but remains firm in its opposition to protests overseas.

Thomas J. Houser, deputy Peace Corps director, said recent trips to Washington by volunteers serving in Panama, South Korea and Venezuela were "the most constructive possible way to express feelings on Cambodia and Vietnam."

If the volunteer contingents in other countries should decide to send representatives here, he said, "They will be well received. We'll spend as much time with them as we can."

He stopped short, however, of offering financial or logistical assistance.

"I don't think it's a public agency's job to be in the business of promoting and facilitating the expression of dissent."

Private Financing

The trips of those who have come back were financed by contributions from the groups they represented, and their lobbying efforts were arranged by student groups here.

Jack McKenna, 27, of Miami, who has returned to his Peace Corps assignment as an adviser to the city government of Cabudare, Venezuela, after a week of antiwar lobbying, said volunteers are turning to the new format of protest as "more effective

than public dissent" abroad.

Peace Corps Director Joseph H. Blatchford has issued strict regulations against demonstrations overseas that might interfere with the affairs of a host country, and some volunteers have been suspended for violating them.

McKenna, who brought an antiwar petition signed by 93 of the 132 Peace Corpsmen serving in Venezuela (he said others were too far away to be reached in time), offered a different argument against the war from most of the student lobbyists who have flooded the Capitol since early May.

"There is very widespread and intense discontent (over the American involvement in Southeast Asia) in Venezuela by Venezuelans," he said, "not just students, but all segments of the population."

Work Affected

He argued that this feeling "has affected our work and our morale. The Venezuelans are very sensitive about American involvement in the affairs of another country."

Since the entry of American troops into Cambodia, McKenna said, "I get questions all the time" from the people of the city of 12,000, where he helps organize garbage collection and other municipal services.

"They can't understand the war; it bewilders them," he explained. He also said that some old suspicions of the Peace Corps had returned—"We are accused often of being CIA spies, and this has intensified since the Cambodian invasion."

Houser, who met with him, praised McKenna for a "sensible" approach. The deputy director suggested that congressmen found it useful to hear an individual viewpoint of what a volunteer is experiencing overseas.

"I'm sure a congressman appreciates a volunteer coming back and talking to him rather than marching publicly in the country where he is serving," Houser added.

He said the President's staff was aware of the visits from antiwar volunteers, "but not necessarily in detail. The next ones to come may want to go to the White House with their message."